

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOVEMBER 12, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
DANIEL BOORSTIN  
AT THE  
SWEARING-IN CEREMONY  
OF  
DANIEL BOORSTIN  
AS  
LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

:34 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Congressman Nedzi, Dr. and Mrs. Boorstin, Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Members of the House and Senate, members of the Cabinet, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Some years ago, a little Mom and Pop book store went bankrupt in Washington and had to close its doors. The people who work with and love books always seem to retain their humor even in the face of adversity. I remember the book store as being padlocked, emptied of its treasures, but a small sign was pasted in the window. It said "Words failed us." (Laughter)

Today, we honor a man, as well as an institution, that words have never failed. It is particularly appropriate on the eve of the Nation's Bicentennial for Dr. Boorstin to become the Librarian of Congress.

A noted American historian, educator and author, Dr. Boorstin won a Pulitzer Prize in 1973 for his outstanding book "The Democratic Experience" or, as it is known at the White House, "The Democratic and Republican Experience." (Laughter)

It is evident that Dr. Boorstin will bring to this post a love of learning and a scholar's appreciation of the importance of libraries and of the unique contribution of the Library of Congress to American life.

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As a former Member of Congress, I am fully aware of the valuable services that this facility provides to the Members of the House and Senate, and the committees of Congress.

May I express my appreciation to many of you who have responded to my request for help and assistance over the 25 years that I was privileged to serve in the House of Representatives. We, who were the beneficiaries of that help and assistance, can never repay you for your contribution to our efforts in the Congress.

But the significance of the Library of Congress goes far beyond its assistance to the Congress itself. This library is a leading symbol of intellectual life in America. Its diversified collections provide an intellectual reservoir that is without equal.

As the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Boorstin, you will extend in a new direction your life-long commitment to the understanding and to the appreciation of America's past.

Dr. Boorstin becomes the 12th person, as Congressman Nedzi said, to head this great institution whose 175-year history actually parallels the development of this Nation's intellectual tradition.

The Library's contributions to America have been invaluable. The Library's contributions will continue to play a vital role in American life in future years.

I came here today because of my personal admiration for Dr. Boorstin and to salute his predecessor, Quincy Mumford, for his outstanding service over a long period of time. But I also came to emphasize the importance of this library as a basic intellectual resource of this Nation.

I am very, very pleased that my old friend, my very close friend, Speaker of the House Carl Albert will swear-in Dr. Boorstin as Librarian of Congress.

Mr. Speaker.

(The oath was administered by Carl Albert, Speaker of the House)

MR. BOORSTIN: Mr. President, I would like to thank you for having nominated me for this high position and also to thank you for honoring the Library and for symbolizing its national significance by your presence here today. This is, I believe, the first time that a President has so personally and so dramatically expressed his support for all of us who work here.

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Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, presiding officers of the two Houses, you honor the Library by recognizing today the role of Congress' library in the work of our Republic.

I would like also to thank the Senate for their vote of confirmation, to the joint committee, which is represented here by Congressman Nedzi, Chairman, and to the Congress I pledge my unstinting energies.

A happy providence of history has made the Library of Congress our Nation's library. Our first duty here is to serve our country's Senators and Representatives. But, this Library is a place of Congress in other senses, too.

Here gathers the thoughts and the words of earlier Americans and of spokesmen for all mankind. Here we gather the present to help the future meet in Congress with the past. Until recently, libraries -- and this library, too -- have been monuments almost exclusively to the words. As monuments to the immortal written or printed word, our libraries are the tombs of such as cannot die.

Within the last century, however, and especially within the last few decades, this Library has come to bear witness in quite new ways to the power of the machine. Most important, of course, have been the new techniques of photography and of sound recordings, which have provided us here a new national treasury of images and of sound.

While these and other new resources have been proliferating, the output of printing presses has been multiplying. The items which our Library receives in a single day are more than five times the whole number of volumes purchased from Thomas Jefferson in 1815.

Now, by a lucky coincidence, the electronic computer makes it possible for us to keep track of our gargantuan collection. Dr. Mumford, my distinguished predecessor, who honors us by his presence here today, ushered our great library into the age of automation and so has helped save us from being buried under our own treasures.

With this computer technology, our Congressional Research Service answers some 1,500 queries from Members of Congress each day. Despite all these efforts, we still face the problem of quantity. Here again, we meet in unfamiliar form the familiar parking problem and the traffic jam. Our multiplying vehicles of art and thought create traffic jams of the mind.

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I pledge my efforts as Librarian to enlist the whole staff of our Library, as represented here today, in facing this problem, to use all known techniques and to seek new techniques to keep the traffic of knowledge and of ideas moving freely and swiftly.

But, we must not allow ourselves to forget the reasons for all this movement. We must preserve opportunities for the exploring spirit. We must keep on those avenues for bold scholarship and adventuring thought which mankind has made and preserved in books.

The computer can help us find what we know is there but the book remains our symbol and our resource for the unimagined question and the unwelcome answer.

I pledge myself to try to meet this challenge, to try to keep alive and flourishing the tradition of the book.

In this great Library, there are other ever difficult challenges to which I also pledge my effort. To serve the Congress and the Nation, we must keep this Library strong, well-nourished and decently housed. If any of our staff must work in ill ventilated attics or crowded between improvised partitions, their work suffers, along with their self-respect and their respect for this great institution.

If we must pile our precious books on the floor, we are failing all those who preserved them for us. If the beauty of this magnificent building, this temple of knowledge, is defaced, we are all diminished.

This grand building, the neighboring annex, and the Madison Building, to which we will be moving soon, all bear witness to the Congress' enlightened and generous understanding of our mission.

To keep this Library strong, the whole American community of libraries and of learning must be strong. I am happy to see here representatives of the library community in strength.

To keep other libraries strong, this library must be strong. We must rally enlightened citizens everywhere to save and improve our libraries.

In this Library of Congress, every task is important. We fulfill our mission only if our house is kept neat and orderly, if our treasures are well guarded, if our resources are promptly found and cheerfully delivered. We all share the greatness of this capital of libraries.

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I pledge myself to see that our Library remains, but Ira Gershwin was moved to call it, on a recent visit here, "A shining star and inspiration worthy of a mighty Nation."

Today, when freedom is retreating in other parts, the whole world needs this Library of Congress for a well spring of freedom. With the encouragement of our President, so personally expressed here today, with the continuing support of the Congress, whom we primarily serve, with the cooperation of the Nation's and the world's libraries, with the imaginative energies of our scholars, writers, composers and poets, and, above all, with the devotion and enthusiasm of our 4,600 fellow workers, we will keep this wellspring flowing.

Thank you.

END (AT 2:46 P.M. EST)