

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Vail Colorado)

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am today signing H.R. 8674, the Metric Conversion Act of 1975. This legislation establishes a national policy of coordinating and planning for the increased use of the metric measurement system in the United States.

To say that this legislation is historic is an understatement. The question of a common measurement language is, in fact, nearly as old as our country. President George Washington raised the issue in his first message to Congress on January 8, 1790. He called at that time for a uniform system of currency and weights and measures. He repeated his request several times thereafter.

President James Madison also urged Congressional action on a measurement system. Fifty years later -- in July 1866 -- Congress did pass legislation making it legal to use the metric system in U.S. trade and commerce.

In 1875, the U.S. was one of the 17 countries which signed the Treaty of the Meter. In spite of that, the country retained its old measurement system. There have been expressions of legislative interest from time to time since 1875, but no further definitive statement of national policy has been forthcoming.

We should learn from this brief history that legislation cannot solve all our problems. Indeed, if the legislation is not founded on public acceptance it will have less than no effect at all.

That is why I think this bill is so interesting -- because the real impetus came from the private sector -- from people in the business of buying and selling American products here and overseas. U.S. industry, in this regard, is miles ahead of official policy. American companies already are making great use of metric measurements. Many areas of our industry -- such as pharmaceuticals, cameras and space exploration --

already are entirely or largely metric. In addition, many of the country's largest retailers are finding it is good business to deal metrically with their customers.

The truth is that our continued use of the English system of measurement was making us ~~an island in a metric sea~~. In 1965, Great Britain renounced ~~its old system of~~ measurement in favor of metric. It was followed by the Commonwealth countries. Today, more than 90 percent of the world's people uses metric measurement in their everyday lives.

A few years ago, the Congress asked the Secretary of Commerce to determine what impact the increasing worldwide use of the metric system was having on the United States and whether it was desirable to increase the use of metric weights and measures here. The National Bureau of Standards, which conducted that study, urged wider use of the metric measurement language. NBS also proposed a coordinated national program to bring this about. The legislation before us today implements that NBS finding.

It is important to stress that the conversion contemplated in this legislation is to be a completely voluntary one. The Government's function, through a U.S. Metric Board that I shall appoint, will be to coordinate and synchronize increasing use of metric measurement in the various sectors of our economy.

I sign the bill with the conviction that it will enable our country to adopt increasing use of this convenient measurement language...both at home in our schools and factories, and overseas with our trading partners.

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