

**2:16 p.m., October 22, 1965,
East Room of The White House:**

“America likes to think of itself as a strong and stalwart and expanding Nation. It identifies itself gladly with the products of its own hands. We frequently point with pride and with confidence to the products of our great free enterprise system--management and labor.

These are and these should be a source of pride to every American.

They are certainly the source of American strength. They are truly the fountainhead of American wealth. They are actually a part of America's soul.

But there is more to America than raw industrial might. And when you go through what I have gone through the last 2 weeks you constantly think of things like that. You no longer get your computers in and try to count your riches.

There is a part of America which was here long before we arrived, and will be here, if we preserve it, long after we depart: the forests and the flowers, the open prairies and the slope of the hills, the tall mountains, the granite, the limestone, the caliche, the unmarked trails, the winding little streams--well, this is the America that no amount of science or skill can ever recreate or actually ever duplicate.

This America is the source of America's greatness. It is another part of America's soul as well.

When I was growing up, the land itself was life. And when the day seemed particularly harsh and bitter, the land was always there just as nature had left it--
wild, rugged, beautiful, and changing, always changing.

And really, how do you measure the excitement and the happiness that comes to a boy from the old swimming hole in the happy days of yore, when I used to lean above it; the old sycamore, the baiting of a hook that is tossed into the stream to catch a wily fish, or looking at a graceful deer that leaps with hardly a quiver over a rock fence that was put down by some settler a hundred years or more ago?

How do you really put a value on the view of the night that is caught in a boy's eyes while he is stretched out in the thick grass watching the million stars that we never see in these crowded cities, breathing the sounds of the night and the birds and the pure, fresh air while in his ears are the crickets and the wind?

Well, in recent years I think America has sadly neglected this part of America's national heritage. We have placed a wall of civilization between us and between the beauty of our land and of our countryside. In our eagerness to expand and to improve, we have relegated nature to a weekend role, and we have banished it from our daily lives.

Well, I think that we are a poorer Nation because of it, and it is something I am not proud of. And it is something I am going to do something about. Because as long as I am your President, by choice of your people, I do not choose to preside over the destiny of this country and to hide from view what God has gladly given it.

And that is why today there is a great deal of real joy within me, and within my family, as we meet here in this historic East Room to sign the Highway Beautification Act of 1965.

Now, this bill does more than control advertising and junkyards along the billions of dollars of highways that the people have built with their money--public money, not private money. It does more than give us the tools just to landscape some of those highways. This bill will bring the wonders of nature back into our daily lives.

This bill will enrich our spirits and restore a small measure of our national greatness. As I rode the George Washington Memorial Parkway back to the White House only yesterday afternoon, I saw nature at its purest. And I thought of the honor roll of names--a good many of you are sitting here in the front row today--that made this possible.

And as I thought of you who had helped and stood up against private greed for public good, I looked at those dogwoods that had turned red, and the maple trees that were scarlet and gold. In a pattern of brown and yellow, God's finery was at its finest. And not one single foot of it was marred by a single, unsightly, man-made construction or obstruction--no advertising signs, no old, dilapidated trucks, no junkyards. Well, doctors could prescribe

no better medicine for me, and that is what I said to my surgeon as we drove along.

This bill does not represent everything that we wanted. It does not represent what we need. It does not represent what the national interest requires. But it is a first step, and there will be other steps. For though we must crawl before we walk, we are going to walk.

I remember the fierce resolve of a man that I admired greatly, a great leader of a great people, Franklin D. Roosevelt. He fought a pitched battle in 1936 with private interests whose target was private gain. And I shall long remember the words that I believe he echoed at Madison Square Garden, when he declared to the Nation that the forces of selfishness had not only met their match, but these forces had met their master.

Well, I have not asked you to come here today to tell you that I have a desire to master anyone. But until the clock strikes the last hour of the time allotted to me as President by vote of all the people of this country, I will never turn away from the duty that my office demands or the vigilance that my

oath of office requires.

And this administration has no desire to punish or to penalize any private industry, or any private company, or any group, or any organization of complex associations in this Nation. But we are not going to allow them to intrude their own specialized private objective on the larger public trust. Beauty belongs to all the people.

And so long as I am President, what has been divinely given to nature will not be taken recklessly away by man.

This Congress is to be thanked for the bill that you have given us. I wish it could have been more, but I realize, too, that there are other views to be considered in our system of checks and balances.

The grandchildren of those of you in this country that may have mocked and ridiculed us today, someday will point with pride to the public servants who are here in this room, who cast their lot with the people.

And unless I miss my guess, history will remember on its honor roll those of

you whom the camera brings into focus in this room today, who stood up and were counted when that roll was called that said we are going to preserve at least a part of what God gave us.

Thank you very much.”