

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE TREASURES PROGRAM EVENT

The East Room

11:35 A.M. EDT

It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to the White House this morning. I know some of you had some difficulties traveling, and some of our guests from Boston have not been able to get here. But we are delighted all of you are able to be here with us.

We come together, here near the end of the 20th century and the dawn of a new millennium, which we know will arrive whether we do anything about it or not, but all over the United States, and indeed, the world, people are expressing their excitement in their own ways about being alive at this time. They're seeking meaningful ways to celebrate their times and to leave a lasting legacy.

We're here today to talk about a national initiative, an act of history to save America's past. I hope all of you will join me in this urgent project to preserve the artifacts, documents, monuments and historic sites that embody not only our nation's memories, but our dreams of the future as well.

Last fall the President and I created the White House Millennium Council to develop ways to engage all Americans in marking this milestone in human history -- to work with elected officials on state and local celebrations, to involve the federal agencies in national millennium projects, and to cooperate with our country's non-profit organizations, corporate and foundation partners as well.

The overall theme of the White House Millennium Program is to honor the past, imagine the future. The President and I are inviting all Americans to participate and to think about what gifts each of us has that we can give to enhance life for future generations. Here at the White House we've already begun a series of Millennium Evenings in which scholars, scientists and creative individuals will help us honor the past and imagine our future.

We've listened to a renowned historian talk about the democratic ideals upon which we forged our nation. We've heard from a world famous physicist who helped us envision the

scientific breakthroughs of the next century. A few weeks ago we had perhaps the greatest gathering of poets ever held at the White House, reading their favorite poems and celebrating America's enduring creative spirit.

One of the most powerful ways for us to imagine America's future is to preserve what we truly value of our past -- our monuments, our art and documents and historic sites will tell the story of this nation to future generations. Yet these very symbols of our heritage, from the Star-Spangled Banner to the monuments at Gettysburg to the buildings on the south side of Ellis Island, are literally deteriorating before our eyes, or will be at risk if we don't act now.

That's why I'm so pleased that all of you are here today to hear about our plan to save America's treasures. As many of you may know, the President, in his State of the Union address, proposed a public-private partnership to save our treasures. As he said then, I ask all Americans to support our project to restore all our treasures, so that the generations of the 21st century can see for themselves the images and the words that are the old and continuing glory of America.

The President, in his budget, has called on Congress to appropriate \$50 million additional in each of the next two years to stimulate a national effort for the purpose of saving our treasures. But this is just the beginning, and just represents the federal commitment.

Throughout our history, in a way that is uniquely American, we have always provided both public and private resources to pass on something of value to the future. Today, we need your leadership and involvement to help preserve America's treasures, and to ensure that this is a true public-private commitment and partnership.

We want to be able to reach out and involve millions of Americans -- from schoolchildren, to community leaders, to corporate executives -- who can contribute to these preservation efforts in a variety of ways. I'm so pleased that the National Trust for Historic Preservation has agreed to head up the private part of this partnership.

Today, the National Trust, under Dick Moe's leadership, is announcing the beginning of a new national advisory committee to save America's treasures. I'm thrilled that so many distinguished individuals and corporate leaders have agreed to participate on that committee. We are pleased that all of you could be here with us at the White House today, and you will be joined by others who could not be here -- others including Jeffrey Katzenberg, Dick Jenrette, and Agnes Gund. I want to say a special word of thanks to Agnes, who has already pledged very generous support. And I want, in particular, to thank Veronica Hearst for the important gift that will support this committee's efforts.

All of you are taking on what I believe will be an extraordinarily exciting and challenging mission to help raise public awareness and support for preserving America's treasures into the next millennium. I look forward to the opportunity to work with each of you over the next few years as the honorary chair of this committee. It's very exciting to me

because I didn't realize until the last several years how so many of our most special places and artifacts around our country were at such risk. And because of problems with the federal budget, many of our national park sites were also deteriorating. As someone who believes that our country has, even though a short, but glorious history, it struck me that we needed to do a better job.

I'm pleased, therefore, that the National Trust will work closely with two other nonprofit partners: the Heritage Preservation, Inc. and the National Park Foundation. I'm grateful that they're being joined by our federal partners, including the National Park Service, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Archives, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, and the Smithsonian Institution. Together, all of us will work to help widen the circle of individuals, foundations, agencies, and corporations who will join with our government to care for our nation's heritage.

Our mission here today must not be left to either the public or private sector alone, but must be a truly inclusive partnership that is a national effort. And it is also a totally nonpartisan effort. No matter what our political differences might be on a day-to-day basis, we will all stand together with pride as we review a repaired Star-Spangled Banner, or walk through one of America's most treasured prehistoric sites in New Mexico, or help preserve the Louis Armstrong archives of rare musical recordings at Queens College in New York, or visit the newly restored tent which George Washington used as his headquarters in the Revolutionary War, or know that we have helped save our precious founding documents at the National Archives.

Before I introduce our first speaker, I want to say a few words about my own plans to highlight America's national treasures in the next few months, and to serve with you on this committee. In July I intend to travel around our country to visit some of our most endangered historic and cultural sites that are so much a part of the American experience. I intend to do this by bus, because I think that will be a lot of fun, and to pick up any of you along the way who want to come for all or part of it, to travel around and highlight what it is we are trying to do; to create public awareness in communities and states where many of these sites are located but where, because of time and failure to continue to pay attention to our national heritage, even people who live within a few miles of a historic site may themselves not realize its significance.

As I've said so many times, the enduring worth of our nation lies in our shared values and soaring spirit as Americans. We are such a unique and blessed people. Certainly in today's economy, we have more blessings, perhaps, than we can keep track of or country. But it is at a time like this that we have an opportunity to make some commitments and investments for the future.

Unfortunately, it is often at a time, though, when we're doing so well that we don't pay attention to what we want to leave and preserve for the next generation. So I'm hoping to take this moment in time, with all that we have to be grateful for, and to use some of that energy to do what we will be very proud we have participated in doing -- and that is making it clear that we will pass on to our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren the gifts of liberty and

creativity that made us who we are.

Now I would like to introduce our primary partner in this effort, Richard Moe, the president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, who will give us some specifics about the urgent task ahead of us of saving America's historic and cultural treasures.

Dick Moe.

END

11:45 A.M. EDT