

Monetary Adjust
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Remarks of the First Lady
Most Endangered List Announcement
Monocacy Aqueduct
June 15, 1998

It is such a great pleasure and honor for me to be here and to be a part of this ceremony. I share Senator Sarbanes view of this, that it is a little bit odd to gather because something is endangered, but that is exactly the point, to bring attention to what all of you care so much about, this canal and this aqueduct, and what you have been doing.

We are trying to create greater public awareness and visibility for the work of preservation and heritage throughout our country. I am delighted to be here, with everyone who has already spoken. I share the very high opinion of Maryland for sending to the United States Senate two such exemplary leaders: Senator Sarbanes and Senator Mikulski. They both have made their marks in so many important ways in the life of our country. And I am deeply grateful to them for their leadership and friendship. Also, Congressman Bartlett, thank you for your commitment to historic preservation, and in particular to this canal park.

I also want to thank Doug Farris and everyone associated with the Park Service, which is really acting on our behalf. If you look at what the Park Service does around the country, they are on the front lines of preserving what we value, our natural and historic heritage. I also want to thank former Congressman Goody for his long years of support for preservation, and, in particular for the C&O Canal.

I am also grateful to be in partnership with Dick Moe and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Trust has done so much good work over the years of its existence in drawing our attention to what it is that makes America special, about who we are as a people, about where we come from, and about what has made us the way that we are. By releasing this latest Most Endangered Historic Places list today, the Trust is once again giving us a road map of what we must do, as individuals and as a nation, to ensure our rich and diverse heritage.

Now, we cannot save our historic sites if people don't know they even exist. Those of you in the C&O Canal Association, and those who are in other ways connected with this canal, understand what a treasure it is. And we want your feeling about this to be spread as far as we can throughout our country, so that people throughout the United States, perhaps through the media's coverage of this event, who didn't even know about the C&O Canal, didn't know about the aqueducts, will be saying to themselves, 'You know, that's really important; that's what helped make America what it is today.' So, this list will help create even greater public support.

Now, what several people have already referred to is this new partnership that the President and I are attempting to create. A new partnership between the public and the private sector, among the federal, state and local governments, and among institutions and organizations like those represented here.

I was quite struck over the last several years, as I have traveled around our country, to see the

deterioration of many of our historic sites. I have also been quite concerned to see how stretched the National Park Service is, attempting to meet the needs of our millions and millions of tourists, while preserving the natural historic beauty that brings those tourists to these places in the first place.

So in talking to my husband about how our country would mark the passing of a century and a millennium, we thought that it would be an appropriate time for us to bring attention to the endangered areas of historic preservation and to try to create a program that would enable us to work together to save documents, buildings and structures such as the aqueduct throughout our country. So we created the White House Millennium Council, and through the council are creating a number of programs designed to reach out particularly to young Americans who too often don't understand much about our history. To try to get them involved in a very tangible way by enabling them to see what they can do to save some of what has made America so great.

The overall theme of the White House Millennium program is to "Honor the Past and Imagine the Future." and as part of the program we have launched what we're calling "Save America's Treasures." We are trying to raise additional federal appropriations, not something that takes away from what the Park Service is already doing, but adds to it so that we can meet the needs such as the of preservation and repair of this aqueduct. Then to match the public money that will be contributed through the appropriation process with private dollars that will be raised using the Trust as a vehicle to reach out to individual Americans, charities, corporations and others.

In the next month we'll have a series of significant announcements about private contributions that I hope you will follow because we've been working very hard to persuade individual Americans to contribute their private dollars to saving public treasures. In my conversations with many of the corporate chief executive officers and heads of foundations and other philanthropists, I have been struck by how they have said over and over again, "We want to be part of this but we want it to be a national effort. We want it to be a public/private partnership which is so unique in America." We are the only nation that really works together in our public sector and our private sector to meet the needs that we're talking about today. In his State of the Union Address, the President requested funds for this project, and he said that he wanted to call on 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 words and structures that are the old and continuing glory of America."

So whether its the Star-Spangled Banner that is in great need of repair in the Smithsonian, or Mesa Verde that Dick Moe has put on the list this year. From one end of our country to the other we have reminders of the work that was done. You heard Congressman Bartlett and the others talk about the work that was done to create this canal. We would not have had the economic progress from the late 19th century to the early 20th century had we not had that kind of commitment to make America progress along the lines of the economic commerce and transportation, and buildings and structures that have stood the test of time.

We are going to be doing a lot in the next months to bring attention to these particular sites. I

want to thank all of you who have joined together in the C&O Canal Association -- which I understand is made up of over 1300 citizens -- to be part of a grassroots effort to make the canal what it should be.

I sometimes sneak away from the White House; I don't want the press to know this. I take a walk along the canal or ride my bike along the canal starting in Georgetown. I don't get to go as far as I'd like to go because I have to turn around and get back to another engagement. But I just cannot imagine not having that place to escape to and wondering at the beauty of that natural setting and the extraordinary engineering feat that that canal represents.

I also want thank the Citizens' Advisory Committee of the C&O National Historical Park and the American Society of Civil Engineers because you are part of this unique American public/private partnership. I announced last week that I am going to be publishing a small book of letters to the two most important inhabitants at the White House, namely, Socks the Cat and Buddy the Dog. We get hundreds and thousands of such letters, mostly from children. They write and tell Socks about their cat or write and ask Buddy what he likes to eat. So I thought that we could use those letters as a way of encouraging letter writing and literacy among children.

I want to give all the proceeds from that book to that National Park Service Foundation so that they can continue their private partnership with the public partnership. I call on all Americans to think about the gifts we can give to the future. This will be Sock's and Buddy's gift to the future, which we hope will enable us to do a lot more with the Park Service than we could do with just with the public appropriations.

I feel like, with all of you here today, we are all preaching to the choir. You are already committed to making gifts to the future by preserving the best of our past, by protecting what history has given us. I hope that you will take some time in the next year leading up to the turn of the millennium to talk with your friends and neighbors about why this is so important to you. Those of you with your yellow hats, who are concerned about the canal and its future, speak out to people and talk to them about why you are involved in this and what each of us can do on an individual level.

Certainly, raising the millions of dollars to pay for the aqueduct or preserve the Star Spangled Banner is beyond the reach of individual Americans, but contributing to efforts like funding the statue in the middle of our town square that needs to be fixed up before it deteriorates further. Saving even the historic documents in a town or in a family are all ways that we can give gifts to the future. So let me thank you for already doing what I hope more Americans will do in the next couple of years. And I look forward to coming back at a celebration that will be much much bigger when we've done everything we need to do to preserve the Aqueduct and we can gather and all of you can take a well deserved bow and the rest of us can applaud and thank you for making that day possible. Thank you all so very much.