

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks on Signing a Proclamation Establishing the Fort Monroe National Monument and an Exchange With Reporters

November 1, 2011

The President. Well, one of the great pleasures of this job, but also one of my responsibilities, is making sure that we are preserving our Nation's treasures so that they can be enjoyed by our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren. And over the years, over a hundred sites have been set aside as national monuments, everything from the Statue of Liberty to the Grand Canyon.

So today I am continuing that proud tradition by adding another monument to the list. Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia, has played a remarkable role in the history of our Nation. It was the site of the first slave ships to land in the New World. But during the Civil War, almost 250 years later, Fort Monroe also became a refuge for slaves that were escaping from the South and helped create the environment in which Abraham Lincoln was able to sign that document up there, the Emancipation Proclamation.

In September, Fort Monroe closed its doors as a military base. But thanks to the advocacy of some outstanding citizens and historians and elected officials who are represented here, as well as the great work of our Department of the Interior and Ken Salazar and the—all the people who have been involved in making this day possible, we are going to continue this legacy, making Fort Monroe a national monument.

This is going to give an opportunity for people from all across the country to travel to Fort Monroe and trace the history that has been so important to making America what it is. It's also going to be an incredibly important economic boost to the region. Local officials estimate that this may end up creating as many as 3,000 jobs in the region. It will add millions of dollars to the local economy in and around Hampton. And so this is a win-win. Not only is it good for the people of that region now, but it also allows us to set aside this incredibly important site for the enjoyment and appreciation of generations to come.

So I want to thank everybody who's here for the great work that they've done. I am looking forward to not only visiting myself, but also taking Malia and Sasha down there so they get a little bit a sense of their history. And I thank the Commonwealth of Virginia for giving us this opportunity to appreciate the remarkable history of their State, but also of this country.

So with that, I'm going to sign this bill—or Executive order.

[At this point, the President signed the Executive order.]

The President. There you go. Thank you so much.

Just one last point I want to make. As I said, there's a strong economic component to this. We think we can see additional jobs in Virginia as a consequence of this. But for those Members of Congress who are here, I still need some action from Congress—*[laughter]*—on the "American Jobs Act" and other steps. But in the meantime, this is going to make a big difference.

And again, I want to thank everybody here, particularly the private citizens who put their time and money and effort into making this day possible.

All right? Thank you, everybody.

Audience members. Thank you.

Death of Dorothy Howell Rodham

Q. Mr. President, any thoughts on Secretary Clinton's loss?

The President. Ms. Rodham was a remarkable person. Anybody who knows her history knows what a strong, determined, and gifted person she was. For her to have been able to live the life that she did and to see her daughter succeed at the pinnacle of public service in this country, I'm sure was deeply satisfying to her.

My thoughts, Michelle's thoughts, the entire White House's thoughts go out to the entire Clinton family. And I know that she will be remembered as somebody who helped make a difference in this country and this world.

All right?

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

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